

Core Activity Sheet 4.1

Newspaper Article

HOOIGANS' BARK PROVES WORSE THAN THEIR BITE

Dominic Fifield at the New Den

Anyone listening to the radio or watching local television news on Saturday night might have been mistaken for thinking south-east London had been transformed into a war zone. The Millwall versus Cardiff match had, apparently, lived up to everything expected of it, a hooligan free-for-all.

But after the sensationalist coverage, the general hysteria and the hollow internet threats comes the reality: there were 25 arrests at the ground and in central London, but spectators were able to watch an entertaining match in safety.

Eight of the arrests were for possession of drugs, while a breakdown of those detained revealed 14 home and 11 away fans. Victoria underground station was closed for a while and five shop fronts were damaged nearby; but there was no rioting, just an awkward stand-off between police and Millwall fans while the away supporters were accompanied into and out of the stadium.

If people want to fight they will fight – a Cardiff coach was allegedly attacked at Slough by Birmingham fans en route to their game at Fulham – and the threat this fixture posed was clear. On the opening day of the season, the conspicuous hooligan elements at each club had injured genuine supporters in clashes inside and outside Ninian Park.

With that in mind, the Millwall chairman Theo Paphitis urged fans to 'keep cool', admitting the fixture had been 'looming large in the back of our minds for all the wrong reasons'. But the most expensive security steps ever implemented in the Nationwide League appeared to pay off. Supporters arriving at South Bermondsey station were confronted by mounted police and dog handlers. Policemen in full riot gear

accompanied the fans to the ground – there were more luminous yellow jackets than replica shirts – while two helicopters hovered above.

'The operation went very well, but at a cost to the club,' said Ken Chapman, Millwall's chief safety officer. 'We had high police and stewarding costs, but we had hardly any trouble inside the ground which is what the Football Association was concerned about.'

There were FA observers at the game, along with stewards from Cardiff and South Wales police spotters among the 709 travelling supporters. The closure of the lower tiers did not prevent the Lions' highest attendance of the season.

'There were about 90 seats damaged by Cardiff fans after the match in the North Stand and they trashed the toilets,' added Chapman. 'That will cost up to £15,000 and the revenue coming in from Cardiff fans won't cover that. But there were some decent away fans and I'm sure they were as appalled at the damage as we were.'

For the vast majority, all that mattered was the football. The game pitted two sides moving in opposite directions – Millwall on the verges of the play-offs, Cardiff perched precariously above the relegation zone. The match reflected as much.

Neil Harris, a livewire striker, scored twice before the half-hour to seal the Londoners' fourth successive league win, both goals set up by Lucas Neill and dispatched with aplomb.

'That was a normal football game,' said the Millwall manager Keith Stevens. The knee-jerk reaction aside, he was right.

(From *The Guardian*, 6 December 1999)